

Let Them Be Kids by doctoring

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Summary: Hopper wants to keep El safe, so he has a rule about house guests: None are allowed. Ever. Yet, certain kids in Hawkins aren't a fan of his rules, wanting to spend time with a lonely El. Occurs just before Season 3. Writer's Month Fic. Word Prompt: kids

Let Them Be Kids

Monday

Jim Hopper comes home early from work and hears giggling.

Multiple sources of giggling.

One is El's giggle, a rare but distinct sound. The other is unfamiliar, which unnerves Hopper.

There should be no one else here.

El needs to be kept hidden. But there's giggling. And worse, it sounds like a boy's voice.

He creeps to her bedroom door, looking down and grimacing when the floorboard creaks. He snaps his head up just in time to see the door slam shut, but El is clearly nowhere near the door.

He rushes over and throws the door open. He's struggling to believe what he saw before the door slammed, a split-second image of Mike and El kissing.

Mike had apparently jumped back from El, who is casually thumbing through a comic. She's flipping the pages rather quickly, obviously not reading it, and most likely not even looking at the images.

"I know you're *supposedly* dating, but you-

"We *are* dating," Mike interjects. El looks at Hopper blankly.

"Whatever! But you can't be here! You know the rules."

"The rules are stupid!"

"Excuse me!?" Hopper nearly shouts as he steps into the room.

Mike scoffs and slides off the bed.

"That's what I thought. You better be home in five minutes or else."

"Whatever," Mike breathes out, as he storms out the door.

Hopper turns back to El and rises a finger at her. "You know better. You know our rules."

"The rules are stupid!"

That damn kid teaching her those damn phrases.

"They are *not* stupid! They are here to help you!"

El scoffs and flops down on her bed, picking up the comic again.

Hopper feels a pang a guilt, so he strikes up a bargain with her. A bargain with a catch. (Hey, he wasn't feeling *that* guilty.)

"How about on the *rare*, and I mean *rare*, occasion I allow you to have guests over, you are not to hang out with Mike alone. It just isn't proper."

"Right. Not alone."

Feeling pleased with himself, Hopper goes to warm up some TV dinners.

Tuesday

After school, both Mike and Will make their way to Hopper's cabin, to visit El, though Will was a bit apprehensive about it.

"C'mon, dude, you guys should get to know each other. So much has happened over the past year or so, and it all revolved around you guys, but you have hardly met!"

"I don't know..."

"Dude! Both of you wouldn't be where you are today if not for each other! It's like... like destiny!"

"Destiny?" Will grins at the cheesy line.

"Yeah, man. Destiny!"

Will nods, picking up the pace so he's no longer dragging his feet.

They were lost in conversation, completely unaware of the truck in the yard, as they knocked on the door.

Hopper answers and gives them both a stern look.

"We're here to see El!" Will announces cheerfully.

"No."

"But-"

"I think I said 'No.'"

Mike threw his arms down. "Come! On!" He then tries to explain his rationale for why Will should hang out with El, the one that convinced Will that this whole trek was a good idea.

"Touching. Very touching. But it's still a no-go. It's not safe."

Hopper slams the door shut before Mike could utter another word.

He decidedly ignores the displeased look El is giving him as he sets back down on the couch.

Wednesday

At the end of his shift, Hopper decides to patrol the library. In doing so, he picks up a few books for El. Ones to help her catch up to the kids her age in school, and other for entertainment since she's stuck in the cabin.

He excitedly goes home, thinking of how pleased El would be at all the books.

He has them stacked haphazardly in his arms as he fumbles to unlock the door. He drops the keys when he hears it. A sudden, heated argument. Multiple voices. Young, male voices.

He rushes to open the door and looks furiously at the table, full of children, staring back at him in fright.

Two of the boys just shrug it off, one even saying, "It's just Hopper," as they go back to their argument.

"What's the meaning of this!?"

"We were just trying to educate El here on the amazing adventure that is Dungeons and Dragons," Dustin says, making a show of the dungeon master folder in his hands.

"DND? You deliberately disobey me for DND?"

El shrugs.

"Yeah! It actually took some time to get her to understand that none of it is *real*, not like the upside-down." Some of the boys laugh at Lucas' comment, that is, until he tried to continue his argument about the spells they were previously discussing.

"I DON'T CARE! GET OUT!"

Hopper continues to yell at them until they were all hastily gathering up the DND supplies and scrambling out the front door.

Hopper drops the books on the table, in front of a disgruntle El, and says, "Here. Why don't you read something instead?"

He sits on the couch and tries to watch TV, hoping to calm down.

Within an hour, Maxine swings by and asks if Eleven would be interested in hanging out.

Jim tries to politely tell the young girl that that is just not possible, but she talked over him. She tries to argue that Billy had a girl over and she's currently fighting with Lucas, so now would be a good time for some girl talk.

"That's really awful, but she can't hang out. Sorry," Hopper says without an ounce of sympathy, shutting the door on her. He immediately flinches at the sound of El's bedroom door slamming shut.

"IT'S FOR YOUR OWN GOOD!" He shouts at her, knowing full and

well that she refuses to see it that way.

Thursday

Hopper makes sure he is home around ten minutes after school lets out, just in case. As he thought, Mike shows up.

"Come on! Please? I'm going out of town to visit Nana this weekend, so I won't be able to see or talk to El this weekend!"

"Well, that's just too bad."

"It's the whole weekend! Friday included!"

"Too. Bad. But I'm *positive* you'll both survive a few days without communication. Might actually be good for you!"

"You're being unreasonable!" Mike then tries to push past him, causally waving at El standing awkwardly on the other side of the room. Hopper grabs his arm.

"What are you doing? You can't stop me from visiting my girlfriend all the time."

Hopper had tried to keep his cool during this ordeal, but upon hearing the word 'girlfriend,' he can't help but blow up. He leads Mike back out the door and shuts it. As he locks the door he shouts at Mike.

"No, YOU are the unreasonable one, risking her safety and her life! Now STAY. AWAY."

Friday

As Hopper pulls up to his cabin after work, he finds himself a bit concerned at the sight of Ms. Byers' car. He walks up to the car, but she isn't inside.

He rushes into the house, worrying that something is wrong, something involving El.

Instead, he sees Joyce calmly sitting on his floor snacking on chips.

What's worse, El, Will, and Dustin are also there, all quietly chatting and munching on donut holes.

Joyce looks up and suddenly smiles at him. "Hey, Hop!" She gives him a slight wave with her chip before gesturing to the snacks. "I hope you don't mind that I brought some stuff from the store."

Hopper struggles to quell his temper. "Joyce, I don't know what you're trying to pull here, but all you're doing is risking Eleven getting seen, getting hurt, or *worse*."

"Oh, calm down!" She stands and walks over to him. When she's close enough, she whispers. "They're just kids, Jim. Let them live a little. Let them play a little. And maybe, they can grow up and forget all about the past two years, as if it was just a nightmare... and hopefully, lead normal lives from now on."

He huffs in frustration a few times, and listens as Eleven hesitantly asks, "By the way... where's Lucas?"

"Apparently he and Max got back together today." Dustin makes a disgusted face and Will laughs.

Hopper felt his shoulder relax, feeling a bit bad at El obviously wanting social interaction with those her age.

"And Mike?"

Hopper went back to fuming at the sound of that name.

As Will was explaining the situation with Mike's Nana, Hopper marched over and snatched up the bags of snacks, thrusting them back at Joyce.

"Fine, I'll figure out some... some ground rules... and let the *kids* be *kids*," He says with snark, "but since they *are* kids, I get a say in what they eat... and they're not going to ruin their dinner on my watch!"

Joyce watches as Hopper goes to get two cans of beer from the fridge.

"Oh, and *that's* not going to ruin *your* dinner?"

He hands a can to her, as she fumbles to grab it without dropping the snacks. "Nope. Because I'm not a kid."

Joyce scoffs at him before dropping the snacks back down in front of the children. El looks up at her and gives her a small smile, which Joyce returns.

"He sure acts like one, doesn't he," she says quietly towards Eleven.

Joyce ignored Hopper's protests in favor of watching Eleven laugh at the boys making fun of Hopper for acting like a grumpy kid.

.the end.